

Census Analysis

Tod Hamilton, an economics doctoral candidate affiliated with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has initiated a study of census statistics for the Wilmington area over all years for which data is available. Hamilton's preliminary findings are found in this chapter, and a full report of his analysis can be found in the appendix. The tables below contain summary statistics for the Wilmington area's black and white population, as well as the overall black and white population for the state.⁴⁵ Hamilton's findings provide insight into the situation facing Wilmington's population as it moved into the twentieth century. These findings pull together, in statistical format, what can be learned from the census about the city's economy, working environment, educational opportunities, and social framework.

Wilmington's African American community always prided itself on its educational heritage and the impact that educators had on the city's students. The statistical data show that the educators—despite a reduction in the number of teachers, wages, and overall funding for school management following the 1898 campaign—succeeded in providing the basics of education in less-than-ideal situations.⁴⁶

The first set of variables shed light on Wilmingtonians' literacy rates. The city's African American population was above the state average for full literacy in 1880 but fell

below the state average in 1900, only to surpass the state average again by 1910 and in 1920. Wilmington's illiterate black population numbered near or above the statewide average until 1920 when it had a smaller percentage of illiterate blacks than the rest of the state. Wilmington whites consistently remained well above the state average for full literacy and below the state average for the number of illiterate individuals. The New Hanover County educational system—although it underwent a significant reduction in funding for black schools—managed to produce a significant number of literate African Americans.

⁴⁵ Hamilton assembled the information using data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) compiled by the Minnesota Population Center at the University of Minnesota. The sample used for this study is a 1-in-200 national random sample of the population. Consequently, the sample size is small. The sample consisted of 173 individuals in Wilmington and the surrounding area in 1900.

⁴⁶ For more on reductions in school funding and the city's educational system, see Chapter 7.